

By Lisa Perez

Re-Imagine Your Library with iPads



Students at Cooper Dual Language Academy enjoy using their iPads in library centers to explore their interests with classmates.

Chicago Public Schools librarians discover that iPads engage students in developing their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills while expressing their creativity. Use their tips to start a program of your own.



In many classrooms around the world, students have begun using iPads to research, collaborate, and create. But could iPads make a difference in how students learn in their school libraries as well? Chicago Public Schools' (CPS) librarians embarked on a yearlong experiment with the mobile devices that inspired them to completely reinvent the way they teach.

Investigating and Experimenting

In 2011, five CPS elementary school libraries received carts with 32 iPads each as well as a MacBook and a charging/sync cart. We dubbed the initiative, which was part of a larger districtwide iPad program, iPads in the Library.

We couldn't find comprehensive information matching our needs about other school districts using iPads in libraries, so our participating librarians became investigators and experimenters working together to solve issues. I developed a program called Mobiliary (mobiliary.wikispaces.com) to offer customized support as well as a web portal to collect information about the librarians' use of various devices, including the iPads. This portal allows other librarians in the district who want to use iPads to access information—from initial setup to loading apps and using the devices with students—to support implementation at their own schools.

Originally, I anticipated that the formal portion of the program would end within one semester, but we decided to extend it through the entire school year so everyone could work at his or her own pace while continuing to meet together. The librarians participating in the iPad Mobiliary program accomplished quite a bit over the course of that year. The group:

- Attended two full-day districtwide kick-off training days
- Participated actively in our iPad Google group
- Attended a Department of Libraries orientation geared to using iPads in the library setting
- Attended two subsequent Department of Libraries after-school training sessions on making EPUB books and using various productivity tools
- Collectively contributed more than 15 recommended apps to our shared Diigo group
- Collectively contributed more than 15 recommended ebooks or audiobooks to our Diigo group
- Helped create a rubric to evaluate apps
- Helped build guidelines for best practices for circulating iPads and using them in the library
- Contributed to best practices for cataloging ebooks and ebook apps
- Helped develop video documentation of students using the iPads
- Participated in a culminating showcase event

Tools and Apps

In addition to the iPads and the Mobiliary wiki, we used a plethora of ed tech tools, including a Google group for communications, a Diigo group to house recommended apps and ebooks, a Google form to create a template rubric, and a private Google spreadsheet where I worked with each librarian to track his or her progress through the program. All of these resources are linked to the Mobiliary wiki. We used Doodle.com polls to find mutually convenient times to meet, and we rotated from school to school for the meetings. Except for the initial two-day training, all the other meetings occurred after school. We created video documentation of their practice using Animoto, and we edited video footage, recorded on an iPhone, and posted it to Vimeo.

The Department of Libraries wanted to provide additional support to librarians as they worked through this discovery process, so after they had completed about 75% of the program requirements, we gave each school a \$1,000 voucher to purchase additional paid apps. Some schools chipped in to buy even more apps. When possible, librarians used our district's Volume Purchasing Program (see the Mobiliary wiki for details) to buy apps at half price.

Device Management

The librarians soon realized that they faced a different set of challenges than classroom teachers when it came to managing their sets of iPads. Some of the solutions they came up with included:

Color coding. As all of the schools participating in this program were elementary schools, their classes had fixed weekly schedules. So most of the librarians decided to color-code sets of iPads using various colored skins or covers as well as numbered wallpaper on the screens. A student who always sits at a particular seat, for example, would automatically know to use the orange #3 iPad. This helped avoid conflicts when students selected their iPads and limited the number of students using a particular device. Color-coding also extended to the charging cart, so students could easily help re-slot devices. (See the Mobiliary wiki for pictures.)

Cleaning. We required students to clean the iPad screens after each use. To facilitate this, the librarians purchased large pieces of microfiber from a fabric store, cut them into swatches, and put them into Ziplock bags, which they stored at each table.

Tracking inventory. To facilitate students checking the iPads out of the library, librarians affixed barcodes to the devices, which allowed them to inventory and track them in their integrated library systems.

Get Involved!

We've just started a new grant called Vision to Integrate Technology & Libraries (VITAL) to gather information about how iPads and nooks work best in the high school library. We'll be sharing information about this grant on the Mobilary wiki (mobilary.wikispace.com/vital).

If you have been using mobile devices to support your own library program, please share your experiences on the wiki and join us on this path of discovery!



At Chase Elementary School, a third grade bilingual student records her voice narration to pictures she created to illustrate the book *Lousy Rotten Stinkin' Grapes*.

App management. It was a challenge to figure out how to best manage apps on the library iPads. Classroom teachers often want a set of identically synced iPads, but this setup typically doesn't work for librarians, who serve many students across grade levels and subject matters. What's more, 20 or more students might use the same iPad in the course of a week, and it's not economically feasible to purchase identical apps for every iPad.

We have come up with three app management options for librarians:

1. If a librarian serves a small grade band, it may work to clone all of the iPads using the sync cart and MacBook.
2. If the librarian wants each iPad to be unique, it works best to download apps directly to each device. This option may be desirable if the librarian plans to purchase more costly apps that will reside on only one device. It's a more time-consuming process, but it allows for greater customization of the iPads and the ability to offer a wide range of apps.
3. The third sync option is a bit more complicated. The librarian may want to create smaller sets of identically cloned devices to target specific grade levels or purposes, such as content creation, research skills, or e-readers. In this case, the librarian needs to create iTunes accounts that map to each set. Then, on the MacBook, in systems preferences under System > Users & Groups, she can create a different user login to associate with each iTunes account. That way, the librarian can manage apps by smaller groups. As the use of iPads proliferates and schools and districts deploy various enterprise management strategies, network administrators may handle grouping of devices, but for now, this technique has worked for our solo librarians.

Volume purchasing. The Apple Volume Purchasing Program (VPP) has shown mixed results for librarians. Price discounts apply only when you purchase 20 or more instances of an app, and in many cases, a librarian may not want 20 copies of the same app. iBooks are also not part of the VPP, which is unfortunate, as librarians may want to curate collections of iBooks. Also, the cost of iBooks and book apps is often not subject to the strategic source discounts that districts may be able to negotiate for print versions of books.

Game Changer

Did iPads make a difference in our libraries? As a matter of fact, the results of this program far exceeded our expectations. We found that using the iPads for our library instruction was a powerful way to engage students in a variety of reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills that address the NETS and the Common Core State Standards in ways that are also motivational to the students.

As a result, CPS librarians were inspired to significantly change their approach to teaching. They soon discovered that the students were more engaged when they used the iPads to shoot video, record their voices while reading, and create digital drawings to express their learning. (See videos of librarians teaching at mobilary.wikispaces.com/ipadsvideo.)

At Kanoon Elementary Magnet School, librarian Elsa Prieto sets up centers with iPads to support learning related to classroom research and literacy skills development. At one center, a group of fourth grade bilingual students acts out scenes from the book *Three Billy Goats Gruff*. One student reads the book's pages aloud while others act out their parts. Another student uses the iPad to record the skits. Students share that they frequently act out scenes three or four times to get it right. Then they show these



In the Kanoon Elementary Magnet School library, third grade bilingual students work in groups to make videos related to their interpretations of the book *Three Billy Goats Gruff*, which they later share with second graders.

videos to the school's second and third graders to get them excited about reading too. Prieto reports that the students' classroom teachers tell her that the kids—"even the quiet ones"—are speaking more in class because they want to share their work with others.

Mobile devices have been an important game changer for our libraries because students don't have to wait to access computers to do their work, as is the case in many libraries.

"iPads have made an amazing impact on our library program," says Colleen Herman, the librarian at Cooper Elementary School. "They are so easy to use and start up so quickly, especially when compared with desktops, that students can quickly get started on their task at hand. The iPads are changing the ways that students are reacting to their learning, how they share their learning, and more."

We also love the fact that the iPads work seamlessly alongside our print resources. For example, Kanoon Elementary students who were studying the parts of an insect viewed print books from the library's collection to research insect anatomy. Then they used this information to create insect diagrams using the Doodle Buddy app on their iPads.

Favorable Feedback

There is no doubt that our students like the iPads. Christian, a fourth grader at Coonley Elementary School, says, "I'm not a very good reader, but when I read to the iPad, I sound like a good reader!" Nora Wiltse, his librarian, shares that "Christian ... doesn't think he's a good reader, but when listening to himself reading, [he] was able to see how he really uses expression.... He's gained confidence in himself."

Principals have responded well to the iPads as well. Veranita Valez, the principal at Inter-American Elementary Magnet School, says, "The iPads provide the opportunity for students to create projects that allow further dialogue,



At Inter-American Elementary Magnet School, sixth grade library students use iPads in a problem-based learning activity where they explore the etymology of their names.

whether it be with students in their classrooms, other schools, or even other countries."

Inter-American's librarian, Fran Feeley, has used iPads effectively to promote research and content creation around his school's social justice curriculum. Feeley is a recent winner of the prestigious Jaffarian Award for creating exemplary humanities programming in his library. He credits the iPads with helping him extend learning to all students simultaneously and effectively. (See iamslibrary.wikispaces.com for examples of how Feeley integrated iPads with his teaching.)

Just the Beginning

This has been a great journey so far, and we are excited about where it will take us next. We're really enthusiastic about the opportunities to use iPads for content creation. Our students are already creating ebooks, videos, slide-shows, podcasts, and graphics to demonstrate their learning. Check out the videos on the wiki (mobiliary.wikispaces.com/ipadsvideo) to see our students in action.

We've found that iPads have allowed us to put our digital resources directly in the hands of our students in 1:1 environments to support learning, research, and recreational reading. Now our kids are not just consumers of information, but also creators of knowledge. And with the Mobiliary program, our librarians continue to set new standards for using iPads to support exemplary library programs.



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